



Falconer, P. (2016). A Solitary Theme Song from a Twenty-First Century Western. In L. Broughton (Ed.), *Critical Perspectives on the Western: From A Fistful of Dollars to Django Unchained* (pp. 121-135). Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication record in Explore Bristol Research](#)  
PDF-document

This is the author accepted manuscript (AAM). The final published version (version of record) is available online via Rowman & Littlefield at [\[insert hyperlink\]](#) . Please refer to any applicable terms of use of the publisher.

## University of Bristol - Explore Bristol Research

### General rights

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite only the published version using the reference above. Full terms of use are available:  
<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/pure/about/ebr-terms>

## A solitary theme song from a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Western

Pete Falconer

### Introduction

Among the features of *Appaloosa* (Ed Harris, 2008), one element that we might be surprised to find in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Western is the theme song. 'You'll Never Leave My Heart,' co-written and performed by Ed Harris, the film's director and star, invites comparisons to the Western title songs that came to prominence in the 1950s. Harris' song includes a number of elements reminiscent of theme songs from 1950s Westerns in the point of view and emotional register of its lyrics and in the style of Harris' singing. The song also departs from this apparent model in several ways, most significantly in its placement within the movie as a whole. This chapter will thus examine *Appaloosa*'s use of a once-prevalent convention in a revived and modified form. Comparing the song to examples from 1950s Westerns such as *High Noon* (Fred Zinnemann, 1952) and *Johnny Guitar* (Nicholas Ray, 1954), I will consider changing expectations concerning the style and content of Westerns in different periods. Comparing how generic conventions are used in different historical contexts can illuminate both the conventions themselves and the conditions in which they operate.

### The Western theme song

Western theme songs proliferated after the success of *High Noon* and its titular ballad in 1952. Such songs were usually (although not always) heard over their film's opening credits. They therefore played a part in introducing the movie and establishing its genre, narrative and tone. These songs helped to identify a film as a Western, and suggest what sorts of viewing (and listening) experience that this might entail. Title songs also came to play a prominent role in the marketing of particular Westerns in the 1950s and 1960s. Again, 'High Noon,' written by composer Dimitri Tiomkin and lyricist Ned Washington, was an important early example. Writers on film and popular music have commented on Tiomkin's novel conception of the song's commercial applications and on the wider changes in the relationship between movies and popular songs that this brought about<sup>1</sup>. Tiomkin treated the song as part of the film's promotion and also as a potential pop hit to be promoted in its own right. Western theme songs, then, had a presence in popular culture that extended beyond their particular films and influenced wider understandings of the genre. The comedy Western *Blazing Saddles* (Mel Brooks, 1974) features a 1950s-style theme song performed by Frankie Laine, who sang title songs for Westerns including *3:10 to Yuma* (Delmer Daves, 1957) and *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* (John Sturges, 1957) as well as for the television series *Rawhide* (1959-1965), and who had a popular hit with a version of 'High Noon'. Although the theme song was no longer a regular feature of Hollywood Westerns by the 1970s, it was still considered a sufficiently recognisable characteristic to form part of *Blazing Saddles*' genre parody.

Several aspects of 'You'll Never Leave My Heart' (hereafter 'Heart') suggest a connection to this tradition of title songs. V.F. Perkins refers to the 'hard and massive male sound'<sup>2</sup> of singers like Laine, Tex Ritter and Tennessee Ernie Ford as a familiar feature of the 1950s Western song. Ed Harris' approach isn't quite as forceful as these performers, but his low vocal register creates a comparable style. A more familiar point of reference for *Appaloosa*'s contemporary audience might be Johnny Cash; the song's understated arrangement, based around guitars and fiddle and showcasing a deep, resonant male voice, evokes the sound of Cash's acclaimed late-career recordings. Indeed, when the song came up in interviews with Harris and others, a number of interviewers mentioned Cash<sup>3</sup>. A blogger

writing for the website *Idolator* also likened 'Heart' to 'The Ballad of Serenity,' the title song from the Science-Fiction / Western series *Firefly* (2002-2003) referring to it rather harshly as 'the annoying *Firefly* theme song'<sup>4</sup>. Beyond these two examples, however, few other contemporary comparisons have been drawn.

In the verses of Harris' song, the minor key tonality and the distinctive meter of the lyrics recall the famous '(Ghost) Riders in the Sky'. '(Ghost) Riders in the Sky' was itself the title song of the Gene Autry Western *Riders in the Sky* (John English, 1949), but predates the movie and is better known as a popular Country and Western song in its own right. That song, however, and the theme songs of the 1950s, were products of a period in which popular music and Western movies came into closer and more frequent contact. The 1930s saw both the rise of musical Westerns featuring singing cowboys and the widespread adoption of Western clothing and personae within Country music<sup>5</sup>. Peter Stanfield argues that the commercial success of Country and Western music during the 1930s was a factor in the revival of Hollywood A-Western production at the end of that decade<sup>6</sup> and also that the more marginal, rural audiences of 1930s musical Westerns became the more affluent, urban cinema audiences of the post-war period<sup>7</sup>. By the 1950s, connections between Westerns and popular music were established in the popular mainstream. The relative dearth of contemporary points of reference for 'Heart' or of comparable Western title songs in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century suggests that this is no longer the case. *Appaloosa* belongs to an era that I have elsewhere referred to as the 'afterlife' of the Western<sup>8</sup>, in which the genre has not been a regular part of Hollywood production for some time and its popular profile (and connections to other areas of popular culture) has receded.

One aspect of 'Heart' that particularly resembles many 1950s Western title songs is the focus of the lyrics. Richard Peterson notes that most songs from 1930s singing cowboy movies 'did not deal with the joys and travails of heterosexual love relations, the pre-eminent theme of country music lyrics'<sup>9</sup> (and indeed, of popular song lyrics more generally). However, many theme songs from 1950s Westerns drew more extensively on the conventions of the love song. This more frequent recourse to some of the most established conventions of popular music reflects the wider move towards the mainstream that had taken place by then. 'Heart,' as its title suggests, retains the romantic focus of many of its 1950s predecessors. The song presents itself as the words of Virgil Cole (Harris), marshal of the town of Appaloosa. The lyrics address Allie French (Renée Zellweger), who enters into a romantic relationship with Virgil during the movie, but is unfaithful to him several times. This type of lyric – assuming the first-person perspective of a character from the movie and directed at the object of their affections – is prevalent in 1950s title songs, including both 'High Noon,' performed by Tex Ritter from the perspective of Will Kane (Gary Cooper) and 'Johnny Guitar,' performed by Peggy Lee from the perspective of Vienna (Joan Crawford). Perkins describes 'Johnny Guitar' as 'a reproachful song of adoration.'<sup>10</sup> An article promoting *Appaloosa* for the NBC show *Today* presents 'Heart' in similar terms, calling it 'an earthy, angry romantic reproach'<sup>11</sup>. The repeated lines that form the song's chorus are 'And when the day does come when you and I depart / You'll be the one who's leaving 'cause you'll never leave my heart.' Similar sentiments are expressed in 'Johnny Guitar': 'Whether you go, whether you stay, I love you.' In both songs, the singer / character insists on the value and intensity of their love, despite the prospect of abandonment. The decision to structure the chorus of 'Heart' around this prospect is another parallel to 'High Noon', the lyrics of which continually return to the same plea for Amy Kane (Grace Kelly) not to 'forsake' her husband. A point of contrast to either of these 1950s songs is that the end of the relationship is portrayed as inevitable; the chorus asserts that Allie is bound to leave Virgil eventually. Nonetheless, the viewpoint adopted in the lyrics is strikingly similar.

The first-person perspective of a troubled lover is not in itself unusual – as I have mentioned, the conventions of the love song are among the most established in popular music – but the explicit assumption of the viewpoint of a character from the film (emphasised in ‘Heart’ by Harris himself singing ‘as’ Virgil Cole) is a more distinctive feature of 1950s Western theme songs. Lyrics of this sort are now relatively rare in songs from Westerns; there are few examples apart from *Appaloosa*. ‘The Ballad of Serenity’ from *Firefly* features first-person lyrics that are attributable to the perspective of Captain Mal Reynolds (Nathan Fillion) or to one of his crew, but offer more of a figurative representation of the characters’ general situation and attitude. Going back a decade further, the song ‘Ballad for Little Jo’ from *The Ballad of Little Jo* (Maggie Greenwald, 1993) adopts the perspective of the film’s protagonist, Jo Monaghan (Suzy Amis). The song, addressed to the son that Jo had to leave behind, comes closer to the approach taken by ‘Heart’ but has a looser, more impressionistic relation to its film’s narrative.

### **The place of the theme song in *Appaloosa***

Although its mode of lyrical address evokes 1950s Western theme songs, ‘Heart’ occupies a very different place in its film. It does not form a part of the main score to *Appaloosa*. Composer (and co-writer of the song) Jeff Beal does not employ its melody as a theme or *leitmotif*, or allude to it at any point in the movie. The song, either in vocal or instrumental form, is not used to introduce, narrate or contextualise any of the action we see. An extreme contrast here is *High Noon*, whose song recurs in sections throughout the narrative and ‘is the source of practically every bar of the orchestral incidental music’<sup>12</sup>. We only hear Harris sing ‘Heart’ about 3 ½ minutes after the narrative portion of *Appaloosa* has finished, some time into the end credits while various post-production personnel are being acknowledged onscreen. Thus, its role in the film is a marginal one; it is offered as a postscript or appendix, a surprise bonus for those who have not yet left the cinema or stopped the playback at home.

In addition, we only hear ‘Heart’ after we have heard another song in its entirety: ‘Scare Easy,’ by Mudcrutch, the 1970s rock band that became Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers but reformed in this earlier incarnation in 2008. This song starts over Harris’ director credit and plays through the first part of the credits sequence, which consists of close-up images of props from the movie (hats, guns, items of period décor and so on) and into the second part, with more standard scrolling credits. The use of a rock song takes us decisively out of the period in which the film is set, which the movie elsewhere takes great pains to evoke (there is even a feature on the *Appaloosa* DVD dedicated to historical research and design<sup>13</sup>). The incidental music during the main part of the film may not be strictly 19<sup>th</sup> Century in style, but it does not carry the same strong connotations of a later period. Harris has acknowledged the shift that the Mudcrutch song heralds in the movie. The *Today* article mentions that ‘Harris initially resisted the Petty song, finding the tone too contemporary for his 19<sup>th</sup> century tale,’ but then quotes him as saying:

The first time I listened to it, I went, ‘No, this is not right.’ [...] But then I kept listening to it and we tried it over the credits and it was like, ‘Yeah, man, the film’s over... Let’s rock.’<sup>14</sup>

Harris explicitly connects the change in musical style with the end of the movie. The shift into rock music introduces a new style and mood. Some aspects of the song suggest a loose connection to what has come before. The lyrics in the chorus, ‘I don’t scare easy / Don’t fall apart when I’m under the gun’ present a defiant, unflappable figure broadly comparable to the heroes we have seen in the film; the phrase ‘under the gun’ vaguely suggests the Western

genre. Overall, though, the song seems to function more as a decisive tonal shift to mark our passage out of the world of the movie than as a particular commentary on anything we have seen. Combined with the images of props, which evoke characters and moments from the film (Harris' acting credit, for instance, is shown over Virgil Cole's black hat), the effect is one of celebratory retrospection. Before we hear 'Heart,' we have already been prompted to look back on the movie and regard it as finished.

Despite assuming the perspective of a character in *Appaloosa* and addressing a relationship from the movie, then, the song stands outside the story as we experience it. This is a significant difference to many songs from 1950s Westerns, which were often active components in the narration of their movies. In *High Noon*, the Western that did the most to establish the fashion for theme songs and to set the template that other films would follow, the title song is our first source of any specifics concerning the narrative. Most of the clear information we can gather from the film's opening sequence comes from the ballad's lyrics. As Deborah Allison points out, the song 'outlines the main story elements, including the initiating events, the backstory, and the primary conflicts that must be played out at the film's climax.'<sup>15</sup> We have yet to see Will Kane at this stage, but from the lyrics we learn that it is his 'wedding day,' that a man named Frank Miller, who has been in jail, will arrive on 'the noonday train,' that, on Miller's arrival, Kane must kill him or be killed and that the marshal and his new wife view this confrontation differently, to the extent that it threatens their marriage. Our perspective on the world of *High Noon* is shaped from the outset by the ballad.

The title song plays a contrasting, but equally central role in *Johnny Guitar*. Its eponymous song is only revealed as such when we hear Peggy Lee singing in the film's closing seconds. Up to this point, however, it has been used extensively in the movie as an instrumental theme, composed by Victor Young. This gives 'Johnny Guitar' a different relationship to its film's narrative. The difference relates to Claudia Gorbman's observation that the function of much film music is to specify, to suggest particular understandings and responses over others: 'It *interprets* the image, pinpoints and channels the "correct" meaning of the narrative events depicted.'<sup>16</sup> *High Noon* and other Westerns that follow the same pattern, such as *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral*, use song lyrics to introduce a high degree of specificity straight away. In *Johnny Guitar*, the introduction at the last possible moment of the lyrics (written by Lee) means that for most of the movie the meaning of the song is more ambiguous. When it finally achieves a kind of (verbal) specificity at the end, this forms part of the wider resolution of the narrative.

To cite one further example, the song from *River of No Return* (Otto Preminger, 1954) is established in the opening title sequence (performed by Tennessee Ernie Ford) but has an equally important function when Kay Weston (Marilyn Monroe) sings it near the end of the movie. Kay's performance of the mournful song in a saloon demonstrates her renewed surrender to the fatalistic resignation that we had previously seen her begin to overcome. Richard McGuinness refers to the 'satisfaction' of the 'passive, self-blaming states'<sup>17</sup> to which the characters in the film are drawn. Part of the source of this satisfaction is its familiarity. This is what makes a reprise of the title song such an effective way to represent Kay wallowing in melancholy. Parts of the theme song, and several other songs, are used as recurring *leitmotifs* throughout the movie. By the time Kay sings 'River of No Return,' the song has become comfortably familiar; we have spent time with it as well as with the characters.

It is important to note, of course, that a fundamental reason why 'Heart' could not be put to such uses in the narrative of *Appaloosa* is that the song was not written until the film, including the soundtrack, was nearly finished. Harris explains that he 'didn't write it until we were near the end of post [production].'<sup>18</sup> This in itself is an adequate explanation for the

positioning of the song within the movie. However, it is also difficult to imagine how a song like 'Heart' could occupy a more prominent or central role in a Western released in 2008. This partly reflects a broader change in the use of songs in mainstream American cinema; although movies are an ongoing source of popular hits, the original songs written for Hollywood films no longer tend to resemble the ballads and other sorts of theme song that were used in 1950s movies.

### A 'modern' Western

Genre, however, is another important context. Indeed, both the song's very existence and its marginal status in the film relate directly to *Appaloosa* being a Western. The resemblance (in the aspects outlined above) to 1950s Western title songs is too close to be coincidental. Harris and Beal's conception of the style they are attempting may be somewhat vague – Beal describes their approach as 'sort of that 1950s, Johnny Cash, cowboy song'<sup>19</sup> – but the song is still able to evoke specific conventions associated with earlier Westerns. Some dimension of homage or pastiche is clearly identifiable.

At the same time, Hollywood Westerns have not been produced on a regular or continuous basis for over 30 years now; this is what I mean when I refer to the genre as having entered its 'afterlife.' Westerns are still made, often in small cycles and flurries, but contemporary Westerns are always to some extent understood as revivals of a genre associated with previous eras of filmmaking. Thus, making a contemporary Western partly involves attempting to combine or reconcile the conventions of an older popular form with those of contemporary cinema. It is clear that some aspects of the Western genre are considered more suitable for revival than others, and it would appear that the convention of the theme song is not among them.

A relevant factor is the uncertainty regarding the commercial appeal of Westerns that is evident in some contemporary perspectives on the genre. This attitude can be detected in journalistic responses to *Appaloosa*. The *Variety* review begins by describing the movie as 'a decent Western made in an era when a Western has to be pretty darn good to rope people into a theatre to see it.'<sup>20</sup> An *Entertainment Weekly* article uses a quote from Harris to express scepticism about the film's commercial prospects: 'We love the casting, but even Harris admits, "You can count on one hand – or maybe half a hand – the number of Westerns that were box office successes in the recent past."' <sup>21</sup> Concerns of this sort appear to inform the promotion of the film. Several remarks from the cast and crew in the short documentary features included in the DVD edition suggest that the impulse to connect *Appaloosa* to 'classic' Westerns of the past is tempered by the necessity to present it as new and improved. Viggo Mortensen, who plays Everett Hitch, Virgil's friend and deputy, states that:

In some ways it's a very traditional story, kind of a throwback. It's much better writing and much more subtle in terms of the characterisations – especially under Ed's direction – than most Westerns.<sup>22</sup>

This is partly just product differentiation, framing *Appaloosa* as novel, distinctive and worthy of attention. However, the particular focus on distinguishing the film from other Westerns suggests that there may be something in the genre itself, or in contemporary perceptions of it, that the film's promotion is seeking to address. This can be seen in other such comments, such as this from Mike Watson, the film's stunt coordinator:

There's a big difference, in my philosophy, in doing stunt work and what was done maybe 20 years ago on Westerns. I learned that action was more of a psychological action than anything.<sup>23</sup>

Both Mortensen and Watson contrast the purported dramatic and psychological complexity of the movie with previous Westerns. *Appaloosa* is presented as improving upon, or potentially transcending, a genre that is implicitly portrayed as formulaic and simplistic. The value of the film is asserted in terms of its updating the Western for a contemporary audience, as in this remark from production designer Waldemar Kalinowski:

I think that's the great modern aspect of our film, that it's not just a great classic Western [...] but because it's also modern. It really speaks about characters that, within that world, had this incredible, complex series of relationships.<sup>24</sup>

The repeated insistence on the film's 'modern' qualities and its difference to prior Westerns suggests a concern that the genre may now be seen as dated or obsolete. Christopher Coleman notes that the music used in the trailers for *Appaloosa* was considerably more 'contemporary' than Beal's score<sup>25</sup>. Again, this can be seen as another attempt to distance the movie from associations with earlier periods of filmmaking.

It may be that the theme song is among the aspects of *Appaloosa* that more strongly recall previous eras of the Western and this means that 'Heart' cannot be comfortably accommodated into this promotional approach. Indeed, an interesting parallel emerges between the treatment of the genre in *Appaloosa*'s publicity and some of the ways in which 'Heart' is presented. Both are very carefully situated, as if to establish the limits to their significance to the movie. Harris and Beal present their song as an amusing but trivial addition to the film. Harris emphasises that it was the product of 'fooling around,'<sup>26</sup> written 'just really for fun.'<sup>27</sup> Beal recounts that they 'were looking for something for the end credits that was a little less "weighty,"' and that he 'was joking around with Ed that it would be funny if we did a sort of cowboy song at the end.'<sup>28</sup> Characterising 'Heart' as a light, throwaway element reflects its status as a late addition, but is also an effective way to define the song's interest in definite but limited terms while keeping it clearly separate from the rest of the movie.

Despite this separation, 'Heart' can be seen as an extension of some aspects of *Appaloosa*. The song's recollection of a previous era of Western movie music is comparable to the film's wider relationship with older Westerns: it seems poised between homage and parody. The lyrics to the song suggest both, through their combination of deliberately antiquated language and ribald references to Allie's infidelity ('Every cheatin' bastard who takes you to his bed / [Wi]ll wish he'd kept his britches on when he's lying full of lead'). Both of these features relate to elements in the movie itself. Old-fashioned language of the type often found in Westerns, and in 1950s theme songs like 'High Noon' ('Oh, to be torn 'twixt love and duty') is treated self-consciously in the film. A recurring motif involves Virgil's ongoing attempts to expand his vocabulary, turning to the more educated Everett for help with particular words. Several characters speak in a highly formal or elaborate manner. British cast members Jeremy Irons and Timothy Spall, playing villain Randall Bragg and town dignitary Mr. Olson, are given moments of particularly dense verbosity. This treatment of language evokes, but also amplifies, the convention of 'the familiar archaisms of Western speech'<sup>29</sup>. In his review, David Denby interprets the film's use of language as a parody of taciturn Western heroes: '*Appaloosa* turns the inarticulateness of the Western hero into an elaborate joke.'<sup>30</sup>

The song's sexual references echo other aspects of the movie. The lyrics shift between comic vulgarity and more euphemistic phrases suggesting Virgil's discomfort with the subject (such as the despairing reference to Allie 'actin' so darn loose'). The film plays on the related tension between Virgil's occasional bluntness about sex and his contrasting bouts of diffidence and embarrassment. Both of these are evident when Virgil and Allie first meet; he asks her outright if she is 'a whore' but also spends much of the scene trying to control his smiles and giggles and glancing sideways at Everett. Later, when Allie teases Virgil with questions about his past experience with women, he becomes intensely embarrassed and takes out his frustration on two drinkers in the saloon, attacking them on the pretext of their swearing in front of Allie. Virgil's mixture of conflicting traits and impulses – plain speaking, courtly manners, awkwardness in personal matters, a volatile temper – draws on established precedents and conventions within the Western genre. His relative unworldliness, despite his past experience with 'whores and squaws,' might for example be compared to that of Ringo (John Wayne) in *Stagecoach* (John Ford, 1939). It is never entirely clear whether Ringo understands and accepts that Dallas (Claire Trevor) has worked as a prostitute or whether he simply fails to grasp the implications of what he sees. As Tag Gallagher puts it, 'We are not sure whether Ringo is noble or stupid.'<sup>31</sup> Once again, though, the presentation of Virgil's attitudes and relationship to sex suggests elements of parody and of more overt commentary. The former can be seen in moments like the discussion between Virgil and Everett after they meet Allie, in the comic incongruity of the gruff, middle-aged marshal talking like a schoolboy asking his friend about a girl. The latter seems to inform the structure of the series of scenes in which Allie is introduced; each is presented as an illustrative episode, subjecting some aspect of Virgil to scrutiny. This culminates in his loss of control in the saloon, where the emphasis is on the sexual insecurity that leads him to harmfully overstep his authority. Sexual insecurity features in the song; Virgil asserts that '...I'll go to any length / To be the man you want at night; I'll get better, wait and see...' A subsequent lyric continues the theme in more comic terms: 'I know you like to get undressed and I'll be there when I can.' Just as the film's presentation of Virgil repeatedly shifts (offering him to us as conventionally heroic one moment and then framing him as a more comic or compromised figure the next), it is not always clear how seriously we should take the portrayal of him in the song.

### **Theme songs and the available forms of commentary**

If this chapter has often focused on possibilities that were not or could not have been taken up by *Appaloosa* and its song, my intention has not been to condemn the movie for failing to be a 1950s Western. *Appaloosa* is, for me, the most satisfying of the cycle of Westerns released in 2007 and 2008, and it is inappropriate to judge a movie by criteria derived from another time period and rooted in different circumstances and conventions. Nevertheless, the circumscribed fashion in which the convention of the Western theme song is invoked by the film calls attention to expressive possibilities that no longer seem to be available within the genre. One reason why this matters is that some of these possibilities might, if pursued, have been able to extend or enrich elements already present in *Appaloosa*.

A prominent feature of *Appaloosa* is its tendency to provide explicit commentary on its characters and their underlying motives. The dialogue repeatedly offers explanations of feelings and behaviour. In one scene before a gunfight, Everett remarks to Virgil on Allie's apparent habit of gravitating towards men she perceives as dominant in particular situations: 'I think she wants to be with the boss stallion.' Other, similar explanations are offered for Allie's actions, for instance by Katie (Ariadna Gil), and the motivations of other characters, including Virgil, Everett and Bragg, are discussed at points throughout the movie. This



tendency can be connected to the claims made by Mortensen and others (see above) about the psychological complexity of the movie. The film certainly seems to present itself as offering insights into its characters. However, the insistence with which these insights are asserted can make them seem superficial and overexplicit.

Had production circumstances and contemporary genre conventions permitted 'Heart' to play a more prominent and sustained role in *Appaloosa*, the song might have been able to strengthen this aspect of the movie. 1950s Western theme songs sometimes provided the kind of character commentary that *Appaloosa* presents through its dialogue. Songs and their lyrics, as Rick Altman observes, 'provide a unique opportunity to editorialise,'<sup>32</sup> but do so in a more stylised and indirect manner than would be the case if the same commentary formed part of the film's dramatic action. Most of the vocal reprises of the ballad in *High Noon* are used to accompany Will Kane walking the streets, contemplating his predicament and trying to get help. In these instances, the song seems to represent the marshal's inner monologue. 'Heart' performs a comparable function for Virgil, expanding on feelings less extensively verbalised in the movie, but it can do so only from deep into the closing credits after the narrative has ended. *High Noon* has its problems; using a single song to represent a character's entire inner life is bound to have a narrowing effect. The expression of Kane's thoughts on any subject is effectively limited to the 155 words that we have already heard sung over the main titles. However, the commentary provided by the ballad remains the source of complex effects within the movie, particularly in its representation of time. The temporal perspective of the song, from which the possible departure of Amy Kane and the arrival of Frank Miller (Ian MacDonald) are still in the future, remains fixed throughout. This creates some interesting tensions between the events in the movie and the song that plays over them, which continues to recall a contrasting point in the same narrative. Tensions like this are not possible in *Appaloosa* because the song comes only at the end of the movie. The commentary in 'Heart' is exclusively retrospective, reflecting back on action we have already seen rather than interacting with it and inflecting our perspective as it develops.

In *Johnny Guitar*, the commentary provided by the title song is less specific, with the lyrics only being revealed at the film's end. However, this commentary is also more significantly integrated into the film's narrative world. This is most apparent when characters from the movie play the song. Both Vienna and Johnny 'Guitar' Logan (Sterling Hayden) play it, Johnny on guitar for Vienna as, in Perkins' description, 'his invitation to revisit an undefined scene of shared ecstasy and anguish'<sup>33</sup> and Vienna on piano defiantly as a posse searches her saloon for the outlaws she is thought to be harbouring. The characters use the song to reinterpret the situations in which they find themselves; their commentary becomes an attempt to take control, to establish a form of aesthetic coherence in the film's harsh and chaotic world. The characters' performances of the tune also position them as outsiders. The film seems to allude to the capacity of musicians, as marginal figures, to comment on society from an external perspective. This connection is clearest just after the first major confrontation with Vienna's adversary Emma (Mercedes McCambridge) when Johnny strums a chord on his guitar and sings 'Oh her name was Emma Small, was Emma Small,' as if this were the start of a bawdy song about her.

Like Johnny and Vienna, Allie in *Appaloosa* is also a musician. Her piano playing also marks her as an outsider, both as part of the refined image she attempts to maintain even in rough Western surroundings and in the hints to the fragility of that image in her halting, uneven technique and occasional wrong notes. Allie's playing is sometimes used to provide a kind of commentary on a scene, such as when Joe Whitfield (Gabriel Byrne) comes forward to Virgil as a witness to Bragg's crimes. Allie's piano exercises, with their repetitive rising figures, emphasise the tension in the exchange. The errors she makes produce an intermittent harshness that contributes to the unsettled mood and the sense of the risk

involved in Whitfield's actions. However, moments like this are relatively isolated within the film, with little connection to Beal's wider score, and are not presented with the same emphasis as the character commentary that is repeatedly offered in the dialogue.

The elements in *Appaloosa* that suggest the kinds of musical commentary provided by the theme songs to *High Noon* and *Johnny Guitar* stand somewhat apart from the rest of the movie. There is no wider context to support them either within the film or within 21<sup>st</sup> Century conceptions of the Western genre. One consequence of the irregular, sporadic production of Hollywood Westerns in recent decades has been that expectations of what a Western can contain have become more rarefied. As I have argued elsewhere, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Westerns do not really have a 'current generic mainstream'<sup>34</sup> to which to relate themselves; there are few clear norms within which to locate more distinctive elements. Many, indeed most Westerns in the 1950s did not have theme songs, but enough did for this to be considered a viable option for Westerns at that time. The popular understanding of the relationship between music and Westerns was also broader; Western styles and themes were more widely used in popular music, and as Stanfield points out, singing cowboy movies were still being produced as late as 1956<sup>35</sup>. The absence of comparable surrounding contexts to help motivate and situate a Western theme song may be one reason for the peripheral place that 'Heart' occupies in *Appaloosa*. Whether we view the song as evidence of contemporary understandings of the Western or simply as the result of particular circumstances of production, it is clear that few of the contexts described above remain available to it. As this chapter has indicated, there was a period in the history of the Western when a movie could base its entire score around a song like 'Heart.' In a contemporary Western like *Appaloosa*, however, such a song can function as little more than a bonus feature.

## Bibliography

Allison, Deborah. "'Do Not Forsake Me: The Ballad of High Noon' and the Rise of the Movie Theme Song," *Senses of Cinema* 28 (2003). Accessed January 2016. [http://sensesofcinema.com/2003/cinema-and-music/ballad\\_of\\_high\\_noon/](http://sensesofcinema.com/2003/cinema-and-music/ballad_of_high_noon/)

Altman, Rick. 'Cinema and Popular Song: The Lost Tradition.' In *Soundtrack Available: Essays on Film and Popular Music*, edited by Pamela Robertson Wojcik and Arthur Knight, 19-30. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001.

Associated Press. 'Ed Harris does it all on *Appaloosa*.' *Today* online (29<sup>th</sup> September 2008). Accessed January 2016. [http://www.today.com/id/26948508/ns/today-today\\_entertainment/t/ed-harris-does-it-all-appaloosa/#.VpOMSBWLTIU](http://www.today.com/id/26948508/ns/today-today_entertainment/t/ed-harris-does-it-all-appaloosa/#.VpOMSBWLTIU)

'Bringing the Characters of *Appaloosa* to Life.' Documentary short on DVD edition of *Appaloosa*. Dir. Michael Mattioli. Prod. Hi-Fi Productions / Warner Brothers. USA, 2009.

Coleman, Christopher. 'Composer Jeff Beal: Back in the Saddle Again.' *Tracksounds* (2<sup>nd</sup> September 2008). Accessed January 2016. [http://www.tracksounds.com/specialfeatures/Interviews/interview\\_jeff\\_beal\\_2008.htm](http://www.tracksounds.com/specialfeatures/Interviews/interview_jeff_beal_2008.htm)

Denby, David. 'Guns and Lovers: *Appaloosa* and *Righteous Kill*.' *The New Yorker* (29<sup>th</sup> September 2008). Accessed January 2016. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/09/29/guns-and-lovers-2>

Dibb, Mike. 'A Time and a Place: Budd Boetticher and the Western.' In *The Movie Book of the Western*, edited by Ian Cameron and Douglas Pye, 161-166. London: Studio Vista, 1996.

Drummond, Philip. *High Noon*. London: BFI, 1997.

Falconer, Pete. '3:10 again: a remade Western and the problem of authenticity.' In *Adaptation in Contemporary Culture: Textual Infidelities*, edited by Rachel Carroll, 61-71. London: Continuum, 2009.

Falconer, Pete. 'Time Travel and the 'Afterlife' of the Western.' In *Time Travel in Popular Media: Essays on Film, Television, Literature and Video Games*, edited by Matthew Jones and Joan Ormrod, 180-193. Jefferson: McFarland, 2015.

Gallagher, Tag. *John Ford: the man and his films*. Berkeley / Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986.

Gorbman, Claudia. *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music*. London: BFI, 1987.

Handzo, Stephen. 'The Golden Age of Film Music,' *Cineaste* 21, 1 / 2 (1995): 46-55.

'Historical Accuracy of *Appaloosa*.' Documentary short on DVD edition of *Appaloosa*. Dir. Michael Mattioli. Prod. Hi-Fi Productions / Warner Brothers. USA, 2009.

Jensen, Lucas. 'Ed Harris Will Never Leave My Heart.' *Idolator* (19<sup>th</sup> September 2008). Accessed January 2016. <http://www.idolator.com/5052027/ed-harris-will-never-leave-my-heart>

Karger, Dave. 'Ed Harris sings (and talks about singing) over the *Appaloosa* closing credits!' *Entertainment Weekly* online (18<sup>th</sup> September 2008). Accessed January 2016. <http://www.ew.com/article/2008/09/18/ed-harris-sings>

Kirschling, Gregory. '*Appaloosa*.' *Entertainment Weekly* online (16<sup>th</sup> September 2008). Accessed January 2016. <http://www.ew.com/article/2008/09/16/appaloosa>

McCarthy, Todd. '*Appaloosa*.' *Variety* 412: 5 (15<sup>th</sup> September 2008): 18.

McGuinness, Richard. '*River of No Return*.' *Film Comment* 8:3 (September / October 1972): 62-65.

Palmer, Christopher. *The Composer in Hollywood*. London: Marion Boyars, 1990.

Perkins, V.F. '*Johnny Guitar*.' In *The Movie Book of the Western*, edited by Ian Cameron and Douglas Pye, 221-228. London: Studio Vista, 1996.

Peterson, Richard A. *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Rodman, Ronald. 'The Popular Song as Leitmotif in 1990s Film.' In *Changing Tunes: The Use of Pre-existing Music in Film*, edited by Phil Powrie and Robynn Stilwell, 119-136. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006.

Smith, Jeff. *The Sounds of Commerce: Marketing Popular Film Music*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.

Stanfield, Peter. *Horse Opera: The Strange History of the 1930s Singing Cowboy*. Urbana / Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002.

'The Town of Appaloosa.' Documentary short on DVD edition of *Appaloosa*. Dir. Michael Mattioli. Prod. Hi-Fi Productions / Warner Brothers. USA, 2009.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Jeff Smith, *The Sounds of Commerce: Marketing Popular Film Music* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 59-60; Phillip Drummond, *High Noon* (London: BFI, 1997), 40; Deborah Allison, 'Do Not Forsake Me: The Ballad of High Noon' and the Rise of the Movie Theme Song', *Senses of Cinema* 28 (2003), accessed January 2016, [http://sensesofcinema.com/2003/cinema-and-music/ballad\\_of\\_high\\_noon/](http://sensesofcinema.com/2003/cinema-and-music/ballad_of_high_noon/); Rick Altman, 'Cinema and Popular Song: The Lost Tradition', in *Soundtrack Available: Essays on Film and Popular Music*, ed. Pamela Robertson Wojcik and Arthur Knight (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), 28; Stephen Handzo, 'The Golden Age of Film Music', *Cineaste* 21, 1 / 2 (1995): 52; Ronald Rodman, 'The Popular Song as Leitmotif in 1990s Film' in *Changing Tunes: The Use of Pre-existing Music in Film*, ed. Phil Powrie and Robynn Stilwell, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 122-123.

<sup>2</sup> V.F. Perkins, 'Johnny Guitar', in *The Movie Book of the Western*, ed. Ian Cameron and Douglas Pye (London: Studio Vista, 1996), 221.

<sup>3</sup> See Dave Karger, 'Ed Harris sings (and talks about singing) over the *Appaloosa* closing credits!', *Entertainment Weekly* online (18<sup>th</sup> September 2008), accessed January 2016, <http://www.ew.com/article/2008/09/18/ed-harris-sings>; Christopher Coleman, 'Composer Jeff Beal: Back in the Saddle Again', *Tracksounds* (2<sup>nd</sup> September 2008), accessed January 2016, [http://www.tracksounds.com/specialfeatures/Interviews/interview\\_jeff\\_beal\\_2008.htm](http://www.tracksounds.com/specialfeatures/Interviews/interview_jeff_beal_2008.htm)

<sup>4</sup> Lucas Jensen, 'Ed Harris Will Never Leave My Heart', *Idolator* (19<sup>th</sup> September 2008), accessed January 2016, <http://www.idolator.com/5052027/ed-harris-will-never-leave-my-heart>

<sup>5</sup> See Richard A. Peterson, *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 82.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Stanfield, *Horse Opera: The Strange History of the 1930s Singing Cowboy* (Urbana / Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 7, 149, 154.

<sup>7</sup> Stanfield, *Horse Opera*, 154.

<sup>8</sup> See Pete Falconer, 'Time Travel and the 'Afterlife' of the Western', in *Time Travel in Popular Media: Essays on Film, Television, Literature and Video Games*, ed. Matthew Jones and Joan Ormrod (Jefferson: McFarland, 2015), 180-193.

<sup>9</sup> Peterson, *Creating Country Music*, 88.

<sup>10</sup> Perkins, 'Johnny Guitar', 221.

<sup>11</sup> Associated Press, 'Ed Harris does it all on *Appaloosa*', *Today* online (29<sup>th</sup> September 2008), accessed January 2016, [http://www.today.com/id/26948508/ns/today-today\\_entertainment/t/ed-harris-does-it-all-appaloosa/#.VpOMSBLTIU](http://www.today.com/id/26948508/ns/today-today_entertainment/t/ed-harris-does-it-all-appaloosa/#.VpOMSBLTIU)

<sup>12</sup> Christopher Palmer, *The Composer in Hollywood* (London: Marion Boyars, 1990), 142.

<sup>13</sup> 'Historical Accuracy of *Appaloosa*' (Michael Mattioli, 2009), documentary short on DVD edition of *Appaloosa*.

<sup>14</sup> Associated Press, 'Ed Harris does it all on *Appaloosa*'.

<sup>15</sup> Allison, 'Do Not Forsake Me: The Ballad of High Noon' and the Rise of the Movie Theme Song'.

<sup>16</sup> Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (London: BFI, 1987), 58. Italics in original.

<sup>17</sup> Richard McGuinness, 'River of No Return,' *Film Comment* 8:3 (September / October 1972): 65.

<sup>18</sup> Karger, 'Ed Harris sings (and talks about singing) over the *Appaloosa* closing credits!'

<sup>19</sup> Coleman, 'Composer Jeff Beal: Back in the Saddle Again'.

<sup>20</sup> Todd McCarthy, '*Appaloosa*', *Variety* 412: 5 (15<sup>th</sup> September 2008): 18.

<sup>21</sup> Gregory Kirschling, '*Appaloosa*', *Entertainment Weekly* online (16<sup>th</sup> September 2008), accessed January 2016, <http://www.ew.com/article/2008/09/16/appaloosa>

<sup>22</sup> 'Bringing the Characters of *Appaloosa* to Life' (Michael Mattioli, 2009), documentary short on DVD edition of *Appaloosa*.

<sup>23</sup> 'Historical Accuracy of *Appaloosa*'

- 
- <sup>24</sup> 'The Town of Appaloosa' (Michael Mattioli, 2009), documentary short on DVD edition of *Appaloosa*.
- <sup>25</sup> Coleman, 'Composer Jeff Beal: Back in the Saddle Again'.
- <sup>26</sup> Associated Press, 'Ed Harris does it all on *Appaloosa*'.
- <sup>27</sup> Karger, 'Ed Harris sings (and talks about singing) over the *Appaloosa* closing credits!'
- <sup>28</sup> Coleman, 'Composer Jeff Beal: Back in the Saddle Again'.
- <sup>29</sup> Mike Dibb, 'A Time and a Place: Budd Boetticher and the Western', in *The Movie Book of the Western*, ed. Ian Cameron and Douglas Pye (London: Studio Vista, 1996), 163.
- <sup>30</sup> David Denby, 'Guns and Lovers: *Appaloosa* and *Righteous Kill*,' *The New Yorker* (29<sup>th</sup> September 2008), accessed January 2016, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/09/29/guns-and-lovers-2>
- <sup>31</sup> Tag Gallagher, *John Ford: the man and his films* (Berkeley / Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 151.
- <sup>32</sup> Altman, 'Cinema and Popular Song: The Lost Tradition', 26.
- <sup>33</sup> Perkins, 'Johnny Guitar', 221.
- <sup>34</sup> Pete Falconer, '3:10 again: a remade Western and the problem of authenticity', in *Adaptation in Contemporary Culture: Textual Infidelities*, ed. Rachel Carroll (London: Continuum, 2009), 62.
- <sup>35</sup> Stanfield, *Horse Opera*, 1.